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SUBJECT: DFM ABBAWI ON BORDER SECURITY WORKING GROUP

Classified By: Pol-Mil Minister Counselor Marcie B. Ries, Reasons 1.4(b)
) and (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY AND REQUEST: In an April 7 call on Deputy Foreign Minister Labeed Abbawi, Pol-Mil M/C discussed the upcoming Border Security Working Group, Iraq's preparations for the event, and what it could accomplish. Both agreed that a commitment to stopping the flow of weapons to criminal militias in Iraq would be a successful outcome. Abbawi briefly discussed his suspicions regarding an MOU which he believed Turkey would attempt to negotiate at an upcoming mil-mil visit by Iraqi DCHOD LTG Abadi. Abbawi revealed that the PM was still leaning against attending the April 22 Expanded Neighbors Ministerial. Post requests that the Department take steps to urge Saudi Arabia to participate constructively in the Border Security Working Group being held in Damascus April 13-14 (see paragraph 3). END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Abbawi explained the preparations which the GOI was making for the upcoming Border Security Working Group in Damascus April 13-14. The GOI delegation was reviewing progress since the last working group on the subjects of measures to strengthen borders, interdict terrorists, and exchange information regarding suspected criminals and terrorists. It would also be evaluating the effectiveness of its bilateral agreements with working group participants on these topics and whether the agreements had been actively used or not.

13. (C) According to Abbawi, the Syrian Interior Minister will formally open the working group but will then leave the chairmanship to him and the Syrian DFM. Abbawi indicated that Saudi Arabia had not yet responded to its invitation and was concerned that the Kingdom would again fail to appear as they did at the inaugural working group. He expected that they would claim that the working group duplicated the periodic regional interior ministers meeting, but asserted that this was not the case. While the border security group was being hosted by Damascus, the Saudis should hold their noses and attend as it was actually an Iraqi-oriented event. He urged the U.S. to use its good offices to encourage Saudi attendance. "Even a representative from their embassy would be something," pleaded Abbawi. He mentioned that he would have bilateral meetings with the Syrians and UNAMI, although he related that UNAMI Amb. Sambrana would not be attending the working group as he was now focused on the International Compact with Iraq. Pol-Mil M/C recommended that he consult with the Turks as well, as they had been particularly constructive partners in the Neighbors Process.

14. (S) Pol-Mil M/C reaffirmed our intention to provide a briefing to key members of the Iraqi delegation. Abbawi

requested that the briefing provide information regarding weapons flowing into Iraq from Iran, an issue which has a greater resonance with the GOI leadership since the recent fighting with Shia militants. He also sought specific information regarding Syrian tolerance or complicity in the flow of foreign terrorists into Iraq. Abbawi wanted to be able to "confront" the Syrians if they denied such activity was occurring. NOTE: Embassy is coordinating with MNF-I to provide a briefing per Abbawi's request. END NOTE.

15. (S) Abbawi queried Pol-Mil M/C regarding suggested goals for this session of the working group. As a next step, she suggested that the GOI seek a commitment from all participants to halt any weapons or lethal aid flowing to lawless, criminal elements in Iraq. This would dovetail with the mention of halting interference by neighboring countries made in the '15 points' agreed to by the Political Council for National Security. Iraq should avoid an accusatory tone regarding specific countries in any joint communiqu , she cautioned. Abbawi agreed that an emphasis on criminal elements battling the GOI was apropos, as Iraq's main problem was shifting from AQI (the focus at the last working group) to dealing with militias. Iraq needed help from her neighbors in this struggle in order to stop the flow of weapons and technical support to the criminal militias. A joint statement committing all of the participants to stop the flow of weapons into the hands of illegal armed groups in Iraq would be a good outcome. While he did not feel it would be politic to ask for a statement of support for the tribal awakening movements, Abbawi thought some mention of them would be warranted as he believed Iran was now targeting them. NOTE: PM Maliki has recently encouraged an awakening among tribes near Basrah as part of his drive against

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criminal militias there. END NOTE.

16. (S) Abbawi revealed that Turkey had presented a revised article 4 to their bilateral counterterrorism agreement and that the MOI was examining the document. Abbawi expressed some concern that the Turkish military may attempt to negotiate yet another agreement with Iraqi DCoS GEN Abadi during his April 21-25 technical committee meeting with Turkish DCHOD GEN Saygun in Turkey. Abbawi feared that the Turks would seek a mil-mil MOU out of the visit which would be inappropriately broad. Abbawi based these suspicions on discussions between Turkish Special Envoy for Iraq Murat Ozelik and DPM Barham Salih in which Ozelik hinted that each side ought to allow their respective militaries to carry out negotiations. Abbawi insisted that this would be inappropriate and that the military should only be involved in implementing what would be negotiated at a political level.

17. (S) Pol-Mil M/C inquired whether the PM had changed his mind regarding attendance at the next Expanded Neighbors Ministerial in Kuwait. Abbawi thought not, indicating that the FM would lead the delegation and that the PM would send his political advisor, Sadiq Rikabi. Pol-Mil M/C remarked that it would be odd for the PM not to attend, as he had led Iraq's delegation to both previous ministerials. "He might change his mind," offered Abbawi.
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